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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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EXTRA! EXTRA! READ ALL ABOUT IT!

When Columbus discovered America one couldn't read all about it. There were no newspapers in 1492. Printing had barely come into use and then only for religious and scholarly works. Newspapers did not appear until 150 years later. An exhibition of the uses of printing, at the Royal Ontario Museum, contains a single-fold 18th century newspaper and a Toronto Globe of 1877. Although the latter may seem old-fashioned in our eyes it certainly was an improvement on the earlier newspapers. The exhibit shows that printing is also employed in the making of maps, playing cards, illustrations and reproductions of paintings and in the decoration of textiles including shawls, kerchiefs, dress fabrics, handkerchiefs, and even fans.

IRON

Iron has long been the world's most important metal. The "native" produced it for weapons in a charcoal furnace, employing a bellows operated by hand or foot. Today giant blast furnaces yield innumerable tons, in various forms, for countless uses. This metal is used as wrought iron, a pure malleable type; cast iron; and steel, which is iron containing carbon. Other metals, such as nickel, manganese, chromium, tungsten, are mixed with steel to toughen or harden it. To-day most of our steels are alloys made with various amounts of these metals.

Over five per cent of the earth's crust consists of iron, but it is only where the iron has been concentrated into ore deposits (30%+) that it can be commercially extracted. Very rarely iron occurs in the metallic state, that is, unmixed with other elements. All types of iron ores may be seen in the Royal Ontario Museum, even the rare metallic iron.

For a great mining country Canada has produced very little iron. The workable ore actually in sight today would meet the demands of industry for only a short time. For example, the United States could utilize it all in a year or two at its present rate of production. We have some high grade ore, however, under Steeprock Lake and in Michipicoten. This will have a strategic importance beyond its relative quantity because high grade hematite is getting scarce.

THE STORY OF A LITTLE ROUND JUG

Strange tales lie behind the acquisition of many Museum objects. In the Royal Ontario Museum a little round-bodied jug has finally come to a permanent home. How it got there from distant southern Greece, no one can say. It is the gift of a little Greek boy who escaped just after the Germans seized Greece. But he did not, as you might expect, bring it with him. No, he found it over here in Canada in a little curiosity shop in Quebec. Perhaps an immigrant or a sailor had taken it there. The shop-keeper could not remember. No one realized its value. It is the only example of its sort in all Canada. It was made about 1000 years before Christ, probably to hold oil or perfumed oil, and it is one of the very earliest pieces of pottery that we can honestly call Greek. If it only could tell us its story!

SAPPHIRES FOR SEPTEMBER

Sapphire, the stone of September, is a full brother of the ruby. They are both varieties of corundum which is a mineral occurring in almost every colour of the rainbow. When transparent and red it is called ruby. When transparent and any other colour it is sapphire. At present only the blue sapphire is considered to be precious. This is merely a matter of fashion, for all the other colours are equally as beautiful. They are often called "fancy sapphires" or a great variety of confusing trade names.

The blue sapphire was once supposed to be the gem of royalty. It was usually associated with divine favour and often considered sacred. Fraud and envy were banished by its presence. It was believed to exert a tonic influence and to be a cure for certain infections of the eye.

There are sapphires of many different colours in the Royal Ontario Museum. Among them are two star sapphires in which you can see the strange phenomenon, asterism —a point of light being broken up into six long rays.

Sapphire is especially needed now during the war. It is used industrially in instruments and machinery where hard bearing surfaces are necessary. Athough manufactured synthetically, the quantity is not sufficient. Corundum suitable for abrasives is common in Canada, but so far none of gem quality has been found. So, prospectors, get busy.

THE LEECHES ARE BLOOD-BANKS

Do you remember the leeches or blood-suckers in the old swimming-hole and how they would stick to your legs or toes until they were distended with blood? According to the Royal Ontario Museum several kinds of blood-suckers abound in quiet weedy waters in Ontario. Most kinds will take blood at certain times, such as the mating period, but only a few species habitually live on blood. The largest of our leeches, **Haemopis,** which reaches a length of 5 or 6 inches when extended, fortunately lives on snails and worms to a large extent. It is commonly seen in our northern lakes, swimming like a graceful, undulating ribbon. A small cylindrical type attacks fish, while a large flat ornamented leech is found attached to the legs of the snapping turtle.

To return to the leech's relations with man. At one time they were used a great deal for letting blood. They still have some slight use medicinally. They occasionally fasten themselves to bathers. Their bite may not be noticed. The saliva of the leech prevents the victim's blood from coagulating. Inside the leech a very interesting type of blood-processing goes on. First the fluid part of the blood is extracted and discarded. Next the solid part of the blood is mixed with a preservative and stored in the spacious internal covities. This solid blood is sometimes kept for a year before it is converted into food by the leech. Unconsciously the despised blood-sucker long ago solved the problem which has stumped man until recently. The leech is a blood-bank in its own way.